



TOWN of HARVARD, MASSACHUSETTS

REPORT OF THE HARVARD HISTORICAL COMMISSION TO THE HARVARD PLANNING BOARD AND THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

REGARDING PROPOSED ADDITION TO THE HARVARD COMMON HISTORIC DISTRICT

May 2022

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SUMMARY

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Date of Public Hearing: August 3, 2022

Date of Town Meeting: October 2022 (exact date TBD)

Property Proposed for Addition to Harvard Common Historic District:

39 Massachusetts Avenue, Harvard, MA 01451, shown as lot 43 on “Plan of Harvard Common Historic District Revision D March 2015” and as “added property” on “Plan of Harvard Common Historic District Revision E May 2022”

The structure on the lot is known as Bromfield House or The Principal's House for Bromfield School.

Proposal and Conclusion:

This report proposes that the property located at 39 Massachusetts Avenue be added to the Harvard Common Historic District. The structure on this property is historically significant to the history of the Town of Harvard as well as of architectural significance, and is located in a key position on the edge of the historic district.

Prominent citizen, philanthropist and advocate for access to education Margaret Bromfield Blanchard, through her estate and trust, funded the construction of the 1914 Bromfield House, located at 39 Massachusetts Avenue, as the principal's residence associated with the original 1878 Bromfield School for secondary education (which she also funded). The property has been owned by the Town of Harvard since 1982 when it was purchased from the Trustees of the Mrs. Blanchard's estate. For many years the house was used as a principal's residence and then for school administrative offices. Recently, with the completion of a new elementary school on the adjoining property, the administration has vacated the house.

When it became likely that the town would no longer utilize the structure for educational purposes, citizens put forth several efforts to preserve the structure (see below). Harvard's Select Board voted unanimously on March 1, 2022 to sell the parcel on which the Bromfield House stands and is working on a petition to the probate court for authorization to proceed.

The addition of Bromfield House to the Harvard Common Historic District will ensure that the structure is protected as it is repurposed as a private residence. Currently the Common District includes 63 properties and the Shaker Village Historic District contains 62 properties.

The Harvard Historical Commission voted unanimously at its January 5, 2022 meeting to submit a report recommending that the Harvard Common Historic District be enlarged to include Bromfield House to the Town of Harvard Planning Board and the Massachusetts Historical Commission for their consideration.

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Harvard voted to establish the Harvard Common Historic District and to adopt an Historical District By-Law in accordance with the Massachusetts Historical Districts Act (M.G.L., Chapter 40C) on March 3, 1972 by article 37, amended March 3, 1973 by article 21 and subsequently amended from time to time. The bylaw is found in the Code of the Town of Harvard. Part 1: General Bylaws, Chapter 48: Historic Districts. Consistent with the Harvard Bylaw and the Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C District Act, an historic district may be enlarged after notice to the planning board and the Massachusetts Historical Commission, a public hearing conducted by the historical commission, and two thirds vote of the citizens attending a town meeting.

Under the Harvard Historical District By-law, the Harvard Historical Commission (HHC) is comprised of seven members and two alternate members, all residents of Harvard. Three members are appointed by the select board, one member from the American Institute of Architects, one member submitted by the Board of Realtors covering the area, one member from nominees submitted by the Harvard Planning Board, and one member from nominees submitted by the Harvard Conservation Commission. Two alternate members are chosen by the Select Board. All members serve for three years. Regular meetings are held once a month, usually on the first Wednesday, with public notice posted of the agenda for each meeting. Special meetings are held from time-to-time following notice to the public.

The Harvard Historical District By-Law provides guidelines for structures within the district. The purpose of the Historic Districts is “to preserve and protect the historic assets of Harvard, its buildings, structures, places, sites and surrounding settings, of historical or architectural significance.”

The Commission is responsible for reviewing applications for permanent changes to the exterior of structures, visible from a common way, applications for new construction and applications for demolitions. The By-Law outlines the criteria for HHC’s review of those applications, including the standards for its decisions and the types of changes that are exempted or excluded from review.

When determining the appropriateness of a proposed change, the HHC considers the proposal in relation to the historical and architectural significance of the buildings and structures in the surrounding area. When an application is considered, it is first determined whether the proposed change is substantial or insubstantial. A substantial change requires review during a public hearing after which the application is voted on and a certificate of appropriateness may be issued. An insubstantial change does not require a public hearing and decisions are made by vote at the next meeting (after abutters are notified). The HHC may issue a certificate of non applicability for ordinary maintenance as defined in the Bylaw and the rules and regulations. The commission may issue a certificate of hardship when the refusal of an application would create a hardship to the applicant.

METHODOLOGY

The Town of Harvard has two historic districts. One is the Shaker Village Historic District located in the northern section of town. This district includes historic buildings constructed or used by the Harvard Shaker Community which was active from the late 18th century until the early 20th, as well as more modern structures, and includes the historic Shaker burial ground.

The other district is the Harvard Common Historic District located in the center of the town and includes many of the iconic structures that are central to Harvard's identity as an historic rural New England town. The HHC proposes to enlarge the size of the Common Historic District to include Bromfield House. Constructed in 1914 to serve as the residence of the principal of the Bromfield School, the structure has been used since 1982 as the School Superintendent's office. With the construction of the new elementary school the structure is no longer needed for office space and requires extensive updating. If the property is added to the Harvard Common Historic District, the HHC would have purview over any alterations made to the exterior of the building visible from a public way including proposed additions or demolition.

A citizen's petition was presented at the October 16, 2021 annual town meeting proposing that the Select Board be directed to sell the house as a residence and direct the historical commission to enlarge the district to include the property.

The petition passed with a 2/3 vote. At the town election on November 2, 2021, a non binding referendum was included on the ballot to sell the house as a residence. The referendum passed by 2/3 majority. The citizens of Harvard clearly wish to see this structure preserved as a private residence and have indicated this preference by 2/3 vote on two occasions. The Select Board has endorsed this approach by voting to sell the property as a private residence.

The HHC will submit this proposal for adding the Bromfield House property to the Common Historic District to the Harvard Planning Board and to Massachusetts Historical Commission for consideration and recommendation. The HHC will then hold a public hearing, after notifying citizens and especially district residents, to answer questions from the public about the proposal and to review and approve the submission of a warrant article for vote at town meeting. HHC will work with interested town commissions and boards, members of the public, and district residents to obtain approval of the warrant at town meeting by a 2/3 majority vote.

SIGNIFICANCE

Historical Significance

The property at 39 Massachusetts Avenue holds a unique place in the history of Harvard and the education of Harvard students. In 1878 Margaret Bromfield Blanchard donated funds to build the first secondary school in town. Margaret Bromfield was a woman ahead of her time. Education as well as the advancement of women and those emancipated in the southern states following the Civil War, were of the utmost importance to her. Through her generosity, a quality secondary school education was made available to Harvard residents.

In 1914 Margaret's trust donated monies to build a house for the principal of the school she had founded. This became known as Bromfield House. The structure housed subsequent principals until 1982 after which it was used by school administrators. In a very real sense, Bromfield House stand as a monument to the foresight, wisdom and charitable ideals of Harvard's most generous resident, Margaret Bromfield Blanchard.

Architectural Significance

Bromfield House sits majestically back from and above Massachusetts Avenue. It is considered a colonial revival home. Like many New England colonial revival buildings, its front façade has a center entrance door, a symmetrical window arrangement and clapboard siding. The architect chose pilasters at the corners and bracket on the eaves. Bromfield House was built in 1914 at a time when architects were more eclectic when executing designs. In Bromfield House we see this in the wrap around porch. Although porches have existed in America for centuries, large wrap around porches were more common to southern architecture. The wide porch is supported on simple Tuscan columns creating a welcoming entrance to the home.

Summary of Significance

Bromfield house has stood at the southern entrance to the center of the town for more than 100 years. It beckons visitors with its expansive lawn and quintessential and appropriate New England architecture located on the doorstep of the town's historic district. It faces the historic school building the principal of which it housed (now restored as the town library, included in the Harvard Common Historic District and listed on MACRIS as HRV.11) as well as two other period houses making it an integral part of an attractive welcome into historical Harvard at one of its main entrances. Its absence would drastically diminish that impact. As current stewards of Harvard's historical legacy, the HHC strongly recommends the inclusion of this important property in the Historic District to ensure that it is not lost or significantly and irrevocably altered.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE BOUNDARIES

In order to ensure that the house is preserved, it is important that the Common Historic District be enlarged to include it, thereby protecting it with the provisions of the Historical District By-Law. We note that the boundaries of the District were originally drawn to exclude an existing elementary school building that stood between Bromfield House and the rest of the District. That building has since been replaced with a new school on the same lot (although in a different location). The Town of Harvard, by vote of its citizens, has indicated that that the

modern school buildings not be a part of the Historic District although they are proximate to historic structures.

PROPERTY INDEX

Property Address: 39 Massachusetts Avenue, Harvard, MA

MHC ID #: HRV.88

Constructed: 1914

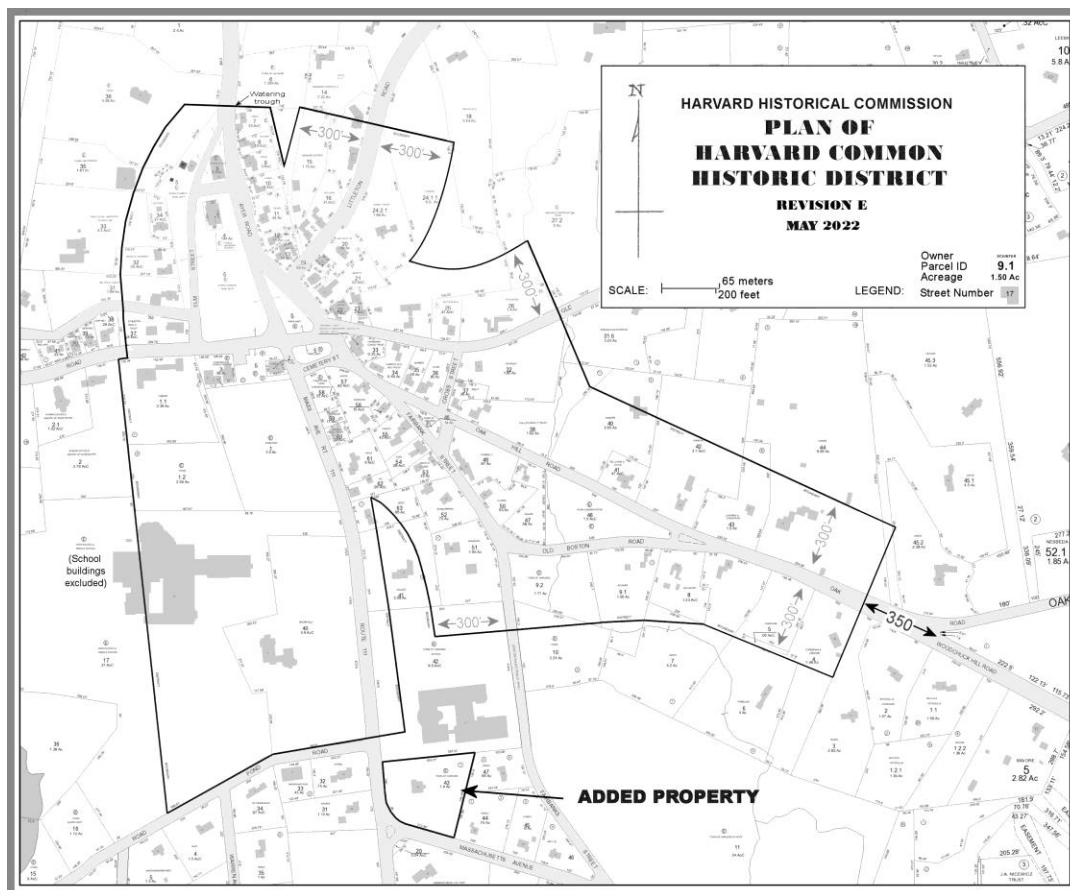
Name of Structure: Bromfield House

Architectural Style: Colonial Revival

MAP

Proposed Harvard Common Historic District Map

“Plan of Harvard Common Historic District Revision E May 2022”



PHOTOGRAPHS

Below are several current photographs (taken May 2022) and an historic photograph (Dunlop family archive circa 1930)







HARVARD HISTORIC DISTRICT BY-LAW

The property will be added to district as part of the bylaw found at Code of the Town of Harvard, Part 1: General Bylaws, Chapter 48: Historic Districts.